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SHAKESPEARE AS A HERO*

The past season has been witnessing a revival of classical and sacred themes in drama. Scarcely has the novelty of Sudermann's "Johannes der Täufer," and Stephen Phillips's "Herod," "Paolo and Francesca," and "Ulysses" worn off when the reading public is presented with dramatized versions of Scriptural narrative drawn chiefly from the Old Testament. Thus during the past season alone we have been enriched with George Cabot Lodge's "Cain," G. Constant Lounsbery's "Delilah," Lewis A. Storrs's "Saul," Florence Wilkinson's "David of Bethlehem" and "Mary Magdalen," and T. B. Aldrich's "Judith of Bethulia." And to vary, as it were, the method of presentation Professor Gayley comes forward with the results of his excursus into the Towneley, Coventry, and Chester cycles and presents us the composite "Star of Bethlehem."

The inference produced by this array is that the Bible, especially the Old Testament, is not waning in popularity as a source of inspiration for literary production. It will be observed that in the enumeration here given no attempt is made to go further than the English language. A more widely representative list would doubtless confirm the impression first made. An instance of the traditional popularity of one Old Testament subject may be cited. Down to the publication of Cowley's "Davideis" in 1638, the career of David alone had furnished themes for not fewer than fifty-seven dramas.¹

As M. Brunetière has aptly remarked concerning Sudermann's "Johannes der Täufer," the author of a drama on a well-known Scriptural theme usually labors under the disadvantage of having his subject-matter, and it may be even his language, determined for him in advance. From this viewpoint it is obvious that the author of a drama on 'Cain' can work with much greater freedom than one dealing with 'John the Baptist' or 'Mary Magdalen.' It is similarly clear that a classic theme like 'Ulysses'

* William Shakespeare: Pedagogue and Poacher. A drama by Richard Garnett. London and New York, John Lane, 1905.

¹J. M. McBryde, A Study of Cowley's Davideis (Johns Hopkins Dissertation.), pp. 16-23.

or 'Paolo and Francesca' trammels the author less than a theme like 'David of Bethlehem' or 'Saul of Tarsus.' About themes which are household words and which are the center of hallowed traditions, the people are ever solicitous and will not tolerate any alterations in the existent conceptions of their cherished idols.

It is this quality of universality that causes the theme 'Shakespeare' to approach more nearly to the sacred, in the respect just mentioned, than to the purely classic. In just so much as Dr. Garnett's theme appears familiar to the general public, to that extent is his treatment circumscribed and his task rendered difficult. If he departs from the traditions,² he is viewed as an iconoclast: if his procedure is orthodox throughout, he runs the risk of being accused of tameness and insipidity.

The scene of the play, which is in two acts, is in Stratford and the immediate neighborhood. The time is March, 1585. The play opens with a tripartite colloquy between Lady Lucy, Sir Thomas, and Moles, his forester and rat-catcher, in which it is made known that the game preserves of Sir Thomas have been poached. In reply to Sir Thomas's query as to the offenders, Moles enumerates a long list of names closing with an especial designation of Shakespeare. He had been previously instigated to make this last accusation by Lady Lucy, from motives at first not revealed. At the mention of Shakespeare's name, Lady Lucy assumes a disguise of professed antipathy which Sir Thomas quickly penetrates. There is no pretense, however, in her dislike for Ann Shakespeare whom she terms

A faded creature infelicitous!
Nimble and strenuous of tongue, I grant;
Rueing her lot and cursed in her conditions;
Moth, acid, rust to all that others joy in;
A withered apple, only good to pelt with.

The reply of Sir Thomas,

Lady, this blast that storms against the wife
Argues the husband high in your esteem,

²Though cast in a different form, Landor's "Citation" is perhaps the most noteworthy attempt to reproduce in literature the deer-stealing episode.

indicates a motive that recurs in varying forms to the end of the drama. The jealousy of Lady Lucy is again revealed in the same dialogue when, with sharp feminine malice, she thus tells the story of Shakespeare's marriage.

This mirror of the maidenhood of Stratford,
 This wan ungathered rose, this vestal ogress,
 Sets cap and trap for Shakespeare; he is caught,
 And frequent seeks her cot past toll of curfew.
 There rapture reigns, till, one autumnal even,
 Sudden the chamber swarms with angry brothers,
 And cousins in a most excited state.
 Poor Shakespeare hangs his head, a manifest villain,
 And creeps like snail unwillingly to church,
 Wishing his godsire in his infancy
 Had brought him to the gallows, not the font.
 And ill continues what was ill begun.
 The crab upon the peach so crossly grafted
 Grows none the sweeter, and the course of wedlock
 Runneth no smoother than the course of love.

Of all those who are associated with Shakespeare in Stratford it is only Lady Lucy who discerns his extraordinary genius. The scene is developed by a plot on the part of Sir Thomas and Moles to entrap Shakespeare while he is poaching, and closes with a soliloquy of Lady Lucy in which she makes known her affection for Shakespeare and reveals, as her motive for abetting the plotters, the desire that he be sent away to find an environment better suited to the development of his poetic gifts. The second scene represents Shakespeare instructing his six scholars in the schoolroom at Stratford. From the first there is evinced an unusual degree of intimacy and freedom of intercourse between the boys and their master, which the subsequent development of the play shows to be based on genuine reciprocal affection. It is also unmistakable that the boys' liking for their teacher is largely due to his propensity to discard much of their 'classical curriculum' for

tales

Of dwarfs and giants, magic swords and rings,
 Paladins, princely captives, mermaids, ghosts
 Freighted with airs from heaven or blasts from hell,
 Saracens, dragons, necromancers, fairies
 That on the beached margent of the sea
 Do dance their ringlets to the whistling wind!

and to the fact of his having endeared himself to them

By wonderous feats at leapfrog, blindman's buff,
By raisins, almonds, ginger, sugarplums.

His announcement to them of his purpose to go to London to become a 'play-actor' is received with regret, which is mollified, however, by his welcome proposal that they join him in stalking deer that very night.

It is the third scene of this act that gives us the first glance into the inner domestic relations of Shakespeare and his wife. In the darkness of the early night, Ann ever suspicious of possible improper conduct, waits at the end of the garden to her cottage for William to steal forth.

SHAKESPEARE.

[*comes down the path, singing softly*].
A fox went out on a shiny night,
And he asked the moon to lend him light.

ANN SHAKESPEARE.

The fox I know, but fain would see the chicken.
Young, tender, toothsome she, I'll warrant her.

But the over-jealous Ann is mistaken. It is not upon *amours*, but upon deer-stalking, that Shakespeare is bent. However, he, with a man's prerogative, refuses to tell her his purpose and stands looking on, singing, while Ann searches the garden. (This on the stage would probably be one of the most effective parts of the play). Provoked at the fruitlessness of her search, Ann upbraids William with spiriting his mistress away by sorcery and in the bickering that follows the mention of Lady Lucy's name, Shakespeare says

Ye both played for me,
Thou in dire earnest, she as for a counter:
And thou had'st wit to triumph in the game,
But not the wisdom well to ward thy winnings.

His declaration to her of his purpose to go to London causes Ann to exclaim

Leaving me
Penurious toil and doles of grudging kindred!
Of this thou reckest nothing, but may'st yet
Think of thy children.

SHAKESPEARE.

Thou dost touch me nearly.
Therein indeed I wander with a wound.
Yet better far that they should lack a sire

Than that the first sound sped to tender ears,
Which nought should taste but honeyed syllables,
Should be the hateful clash of parents' jarring.
So I withdraw me and await occasion
Of reappearance like the sudden beam
Of heaven's light shed around them. Think not, Anna,
I do abandon thee. The tie of Love
Is ruptured, rather say 'twas never knit;
The tie of duty holds . . .

ANN.

When see I thee again?

SHAKESPEARE.

What time my winnings

Suffice to buy me the best house in Stratford;
With all the desirable appendages
Of gardens and commodious outbuildings.

Ann's anger mounts to fury when Shakespeare tells her that she herself will be the means of making "this moonshine gold" since she has furnished him with the conception of a merry jape, "The Taming of a Shrew," which shall pave his road to reputation. His disclaimer that he did not portray Ann in the character of the shrew fails to appease her and she rushes into the house, returning with a red-hot iron. But in the meantime Shakespeare has taken the crossbows from the hollow of a tree and departed.

The short concluding scene of this act reveals the six timorous scholars awaiting their master in Sir Thomas Lucy's woods. When the belated Shakespeare arrives, he distributes the crossbows and they move cautiously along tracking the deer in the dim moonlight. Suddenly Moles and a party of foresters, appearing, seize the youthful poachers, while Shakespeare utters the apocalyptic exclamation (taken from Marlowe's "Faustus"):

Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight,
And burned is Apollo's laurel bough.

[*The curtain falls.*

In the opening scene of the second act the author attempts to portray in the manner of Shakespeare the humorous situation in which the clerk of the Stratford court instructs five fathers and a mother how best to conduct themselves during the impending trial.

The second scene is also preparatory to the one to follow but fits more integrally into the play. Sir Thomas Lucy, who is

both plaintiff and judge, is holding a soliloquy in his private room in the court-house. He has already determined

To bench him squarely with a mind made up,
and is asserting with firm resolution

My foe is at my feet, there shall he lie,
Though all the angels swore his alibi;

when a knocking is heard at the door and Lady Lucy enters. Knowing that Sir Thomas is accustomed in criminal trials to determine the sentence in advance, she comes to petition that Shakespeare be banished rather than whipped or imprisoned. But the request from its nature excites his jealousy and causes him to deny the boon, whereupon Lady Lucy proceeds to make threats. At this troubled juncture Ann presents herself. Sir Thomas divining that she comes to entreat pardon for her spouse, seeks to anticipate her request. But Ann denies that such is her errand, preferring instead the following remarkable petition:

Pardon I pray not then, but penalty
Conducive to his reformation;
Like lightning, sanctifying where it strikes.
And in my poor conceit, the lash, applied
By loving spirits wielding arms of flesh,
Best scared this poaching devil out of him.

On being reproached by both Lady Lucy and Sir Thomas, Ann rejoins that the thought of her poor children and the necessity of providing food for them was the reason for her request that William be whipped rather than imprisoned. The continued advocacy of this unrefined method of punishment brings her naturally into conflict with Lady Lucy; nor is the presence of Sir Thomas sufficient to repress their mutual recrimination. To his relief, an attendant enters and announces that the court expects its magistrate.

The scene is transferred to the court-house where the hand-cuffed Shakespeare in the presence of the public, the accused children and their parents, and the court officials awaits Sir Thomas's judgment. A plea of guilty is entered but, in extenuation of his crime, Shakespeare delivers a long address accusing Sir Thomas of having devoured the commons, ravaged the crops, and barred the paths to make parks and warrens, adding

Now, did I tell this populace I took
Thy deer for public cause, they would acclaim me,
Shakespeare, the Robin Hood of Warwickshire.
I shall not tell them, 'twere but half the truth.
I am the people's poet, not their tribune.
Sport pointed me the way with beechen spear,
And Youth, too young to know what conscience is.

At Sir Thomas's command, Ann testifies to Shakespeare's character, averring

A good youth were he, were he not a poet,
And were we not too nearly of an age,
As to the Court is plainly visible.

It is with a purpose that Sir Thomas again asks her what chastisement she deems most meet and receives again the reply, the lash. Lady Lucy continuing to advocate banishment, Sir Thomas determines on all three penalties—whipping, imprisonment, and exile for three years. The constable hesitates to lay hands on Shakespeare for the purpose of leading him away, fearing that he has a familiar spirit; but at this moment a messenger arrives from the Queen to make requisition for Shakespeare. His travel-stained horseman's cloak prevents him from being recognized and as a consequence Sir Thomas is led to reprove him for his freedom of address, whereupon the stranger throws aside the cloak and reveals the Earl of Leicester. By virtue of superior commission he annuls the sentence and quashes the indictment, amid the applause of the public. After an explanation of this extraordinary procedure is made to Sir Thomas, an excellent bit of colloquy takes place between Leicester and Shakespeare:

LEICESTER.

Deer-killing came in with the Conqueror.
Hast any record of thy lineage?

SHAKESPEARE.

An ancestor of mine, so please your Lordship,
In our third Henry's reign, was high exalted.

[*Aside.*] Upon the gallows.

LEICESTER.

Like lot shall be thine.

SHAKESPEAKE.

[*Aside.*] The Lord forbid!

LEICESTER.

If thou do justify
Opinion by her Majesty conceived

Of thy facetious wit and parts. She hath heard
 A little toy of thine, a comedy
 ('Tis called, I think, The Taming of a Shrew)
 Read by a maid of honour, thereunto
 Moved, as I gather, by one Master Field,
 Late of this town, who further doth attest
 Actor and bard met happily in thee.
 Nought now will serve but thou must post to Court.

The feud between Shakespeare and Sir Thomas is appeased by the former's promise to stand a friend to Sir Thomas at court on condition that he unclosethe path stopped last Christmas and that, with the Earl's consent, the period of banishment be extended to ten years. Shakespeare brings his desolate wife and children to the notice of Leicester, who commends them to the care of Sir Thomas, admonishing him to "bestow rather excess than insufficiency." At the conclusion of the leave-taking between Shakespeare and Ann, the play is brought abruptly to an end by an attendant—in this case indeed a *deus ex machine*—who enters and whispers to Leicesier. Leicester at once calls "To horse! To horse!" and departs in company with Shakespeare. The curtain falls.

The inadequate motivization for this closing *coup* constitutes a weakness. Leicester's haste is obvious from the time of his arrival, but the reason assigned by him for it is that he must hie with Shakespeare to Kenilworth and thence to London where royal favor awaits them. The abrupt call to horse, as though he were beset by enemies, suggests that the dreaded Armada is at last at England's doors and that Leicester has been summoned to the defense of the realm. But, since scarcely two minutes before, the war with Spain is spoken of as still being far in the future, it is probable that the author had in mind Leicester's concern lest his absence from court might endanger his position with the Queen.

Although the action is supposed to occur in March, 1585, the author's knowledge of events subsequent to that time leads him to transfer this knowledge to his characters, whence a spirit of prophecy unusual and almost incongruous. Such for instance is Shakespeare's declaration to Ann (p. 50):

And I will seek a manly soul, and wear him
 In my heart's core, even in my heart of hearts.

And in high verse I will eternize him,
Blazoning his beauty forth, his name concealing
To set the wide world wondering who he was,
And sharp debate shall drain the inky stands
Of sage and scholar labouring to divine
If worth it was of his, or wit of mine.

or most remarkable of all, the question of one of Shakespeare's scholars,

Dear master, did you ever kill a pig?

and the clairvoyant reply :

Aye, boy, and thou dost mind me that, when once
A daughter of swart Egypt scanned my palm,
This was the sibyl's rede. Beware of bacon.
Dark speech ! which the far future shall unriddle.

In passages such as these Dr. Garnett has clearly gone too far. The verisimilitude of the portrayal is of course spoiled when it becomes obvious that the persons have a knowledge of future events.

The same objection may be brought to putting into the speech of the leading characters quotations from Shakespeare's works written years after the time in which this play is set. There are no fewer than seven instances of such citations of passages ranging from one to two lines in length. The two lines quoted above upon Shakespeare's arrest are from the description of Faust at the close of Marlowe's play. In the case of the line (p. 18) virtually quoted from Gray's *Elegy*,

Pouring upon the brook that babbled by,

the anachronism is all the greater.

The author's taste may also be questioned in causing Shakespeare to mention his wife's name in the following colloquy with his boys.

SHAKESPEARE.

The hour sounds for our parting.

THE SCHOLARS.

Parting, Master?

SHAKESPEARE.

Yes, boys, I must to London: part by choice,
Compulsion part: yet be my Ann unchided, etc.

There is a doubtful propriety in these words when addressed to his school-boys, even though it be granted that Shakespeare's differences with Ann were the common talk of the village.

But most of these defects seem trivial in comparison with the larger unities and the numerous undoubted excellences of the play, which the foregoing quotations have served to illustrate. One point of general criticism however suggests itself. The unbiased student taking up a drama entitled "William Shakespeare" might well expect to find the speeches assigned to that character pitched in a strain of loftier language, more sustained eloquence than that attained by ordinary characters in pentameter verse. The author of such sustained passages of impassioned eloquence as Hamlet's soliloquy, Othello's defense, Clarence's dream, Portia's plea for mercy, and Titania's complaint to Oberon, to cite only a few, would, when his own vital interests were at stake, have expressed his passionate earnestness in speech more exalted than Dr. Garnett here allots to him. Whatever his matter may be, his manner should be distinctive. This distinction of manner, combined with a magnetic presence, would then be sufficient to explain the not too apparent reason why Lady Lucy was able to discern his extraordinary poetic genius and foresee in a measure the inheritance that awaited him.

J. D. RODEFFER.

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